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SUBJECT: GUIDANCE: MIDDLE EAST CONSULTATIONS, DECEMBER 17

¶1. (U) This is an action request. USUN may draw from para two elements when making its intervention during Middle East consultations in the Security Council on December 17.

¶2. (SBU) Begin elements:

I thank Special Coordinator Serry for his report.

Advancing the cause of comprehensive peace in the Middle East remains among the United States' most important foreign policy endeavors. Our commitment to this goal is unwavering, and it is only through negotiations that this objective can be realized.

As Secretary of State Clinton said on November 25, we believe that through good faith negotiations the parties can mutually agree on an outcome which ends the conflict and reconciles the Palestinian goal of an independent and viable state based on the 1967 lines, with agreed swaps, and the Israeli goal of a Jewish state with secure and recognized borders that reflect subsequent developments.

The most significant development since the Council discussed this matter in November has been the declaration by the Israeli government of a moratorium on new settlement construction in the West Bank. As Special Envoy for Middle East Peace Mitchell has stated, while this moratorium falls short of a full settlement freeze, the steps announced by Prime Minister Netanyahu are significant and could have substantial impact on the ground. They are more than any Israeli Government has done before, and can help move toward agreement between the parties that will ultimately lead to an end to the conflict and a two-state solution.

It is important to underscore in this regard that a freeze on settlement activity is an Israeli obligation under the Roadmap, and that the Quartet has long called on all parties to uphold their Roadmap obligations. United States policy on settlements remains unaffected and unchanged. As President Obama has stated, America does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. United States policy on Jerusalem also remains unaffected and unchanged. The status of Jerusalem and all other permanent status issues should be resolved through negotiations.

The United States disagrees with some Israeli actions in Jerusalem affecting Palestinians in areas such as housing, including the continuing pattern of evictions and demolitions of Palestinian homes. We do not accept unilateral actions by the parties that could have the effect of preempting, or appearing to pre-empt, negotiations.

[Optional Contingency Point on the December 11 Yasuf Mosque incident: We condemn the recent attack on a mosque in the West Bank in the strongest terms and call for the

perpetrators to be brought to justice. We understand that an investigation is under way.]

Having said that, we see positive steps to improve the atmosphere for negotiations, such as the settlements moratorium, as a valuable contribution towards achieving the goal of a two-state solution. That is why we also have urged the Palestinian Authority to continue and expand its ongoing security efforts and to take strong and meaningful action on incitement.

Similarly, we call for Israel to reopen crossings, with appropriate monitoring and appreciation for security concerns, so that legitimate goods can enter Gaza consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 1860, thus alleviating the hardships and stress that civilians in Gaza face every day.

We also continue to urge Arab states to take steps toward normalization of relations with Israel. As direct negotiations resume, we seek to re-establish a multilateral track in which regional governments, including Israel, would meet to discuss issues they have in common, such as energy and water, to the benefit of everyone in the region. The best approach is a mix of contacts and a variety of tracks, including high-level direct talks that establish the framework and set the tone, parallel talks with the U.S. about key issues, and lower-level direct talks where the details of issues are often worked out.

We also continue to call on Hamas to accept the principles established by the Quartet that are the building blocks of an independent Palestinian state--renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements between the parties--and demonstrate that they are more interested in building a better future for the Palestinian people than in rhetoric. We also continue to call for the immediate release of Gilad Shalit.

As Special Envoy Mitchell has made clear, despite the difficulties and the complex political circumstances in the region, we are committed to re-launching negotiations. We will not be deterred by setbacks. We are determined to stay the course in the cause of comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Lastly, we congratulate the new Lebanese government on its vote of Parliamentary confidence. We call upon all parties to fulfill the provisions of Security Council resolutions 1559, 1680, and 1701.

End elements.
CLINTON